

May 4, 2000

IDEA FULL FUNDING ACT OF 2000

-----

Statement of HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS

[Page: E634]

- Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to express my opposition to H.R. 4055, which authorizes over \$160 billion in new federal spending for programs imposed on local school districts by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While I share the goal of devoting more resources to educating children with learning disabilities, I believe that there is a better way to achieve this laudable goal than increasing spending on an unconstitutional, failed program that thrusts children, parents, and schools into an administrative quagmire. Under the system set up by IDEA, parents and schools often become advisories and important decisions regarding a child's future are made via litigation. I have received compliments from a special education administrator in my district that unscrupulous trial lawyers are manipulating the IDEA process to line their pockets at the expenses of local school districts. Of course, every dollar a local school district has to spend on litigation is a dollar the district cannot spend educating children.

- IDEA may also force local schools to deny children access to the education that best suits their unique needs in order to fulfill the federal command that disabled children be educated 'in the least restrictive setting,' which in practice means mainstreaming. Many children may thrive in a mainstream classroom environment, however, some children may be mainstreamed solely because school officials believe it is required by federal law, even though the mainstream environment is not the most appropriate for that child.

- On May 10, 1994, Dr. Mary Wagner testified before the Education Committee that disabled children who are not placed in a mainstream classroom graduate from high school at a much higher rate than disabled children who are mainstreamed. Dr. Wagner quite properly accused Congress of sacrificing children to ideology.

- Increasing IDEA spending also provides incentives to over-identify children as learning disabled, thus unfairly stigmatizing many children and, in a vicious cycle, leading to more demands for increased federal spending on IDEA. Instead of increasing spending on a federal program that may actually damage the children it claims to help, Congress should return control over education to those who best know the child's needs: parents. In order to restore parental control to education, I have introduced the Family Education Freedom Act (H.R. 935), which provides parents with a \$3,000 per child tax credit to pay for K-12 education expenses. My tax credit would be of greatest benefit to parents of children with learning disabilities because it would allow them to devote more of their resources to ensure their children get an education that meets the child's unique needs.

- In conclusion, I would remind my colleagues that parents and local communities know their children so much better than any federal bureaucrat, and they can do a better job of meeting a child's needs than we in Washington. There is no way that the unique needs of my grandchildren, and some young boy or girl in Los Angeles, CA or New York City can be educated by some sort of 'Cookie Cutter' approach. Thus, the best means of helping disabled children is to empower their parents with the resources to make sure their children receive an education suited to their child's special needs, instead of an education that sacrifices that child's best interest on the altar of the 'Washington-knows-best' ideology.

- I therefore urge my colleagues to join with me in helping parents of special needs children to provide their children with an education by repealing federal mandates that divert resources away from helping children and, instead, embrace my Family Education Freedom Act.